



Corner Stores Becoming Fruitful in the Eastside

Intervention Summary

The tale of two stores: La Tapatia and La Michoacana are two corner stores identified through CX³ work that showed potential and interest in making healthy retail changes. With the backing and coordination of partners and funding (via the Kaiser HEAL Zone grant), the NEOP retail team started working with both store owners. The first step was to establish a working relationship with frequent visits, encouragement, and sharing best practices and retail expertise in marketing fresh produce. Though reluctant at first, trust grew with each visit as NEOP staff facilitated opportunities for improving quality, freshness, pricing, delivery and display of produce, including HEAL Zone incentives for extensive environmental changes.

Through HEAL Zone funds, La Tapatia was able to replace their old produce cooler with a cost-saving and environmentally friendly refrigeration system. In addition, the store staff are now consistently posting prices for their produce using Champions for Change retail price cards. Lack of pricing was a CX³ finding, as shoppers may hesitate to purchase produce when the price isn't marked. Using the retail guide, the store was able to maximize produce freshness by changing the storage and rotating the displays for optimal temperature and humidity. Working with volunteers, residents, a community youth group and local parks staff, La Tapatia was able to receive a beautiful façade makeover with a resident-designed mural and HEAL Zone Logo. La Michoacana participated in a community clean-up day, where residents and volunteers removed gum, painted over graffiti along the walls and picked up garbage surrounding the store. The owner removed all the hard liquor from his store, making La Michoacana a family-friendly grocery store rather than a liquor store.

As a suggestion to encourage store owners to sell more local produce, both stores were provided with contact information for growers and distributors of fruits and vegetables. Since Riverside Unified School District purchases locally-grown produce and delivers daily to nearby elementary schools, they offered to purchase, prepare and deliver washed and packaged produce items to the store at cost.

Store owners are taking more pride in their fruits and vegetables, maintaining better variety and quality, and keeping prices posted. NEOP staff are supporting the stores with healthy signage, including recipes, cookbooks and Harvest of the Month information for seasonal produce items. Resident awareness has increased, with media outreach and partner involvement, in hopes that both stores would feel supported by the community in continuing to provide healthy fresh food at an affordable price.



La Tapatia employees promote fruits & vegetables. Community partners and residents paint a mural.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

Store owners demonstrated an initial distrust in working with government entities, especially with funding restrictions and expectations that may not match their vision for their store. Both were hesitant about the adoption of the changes, and if their shoppers would take notice. Through continuous visits to the stores, a relationship was built with the owners, clerks and frequent shoppers.

Store owners still struggle with pricing, trying out new suppliers, and managing stocking levels of quality produce. They are testing out the demand, and discovering the cultural needs of their immediate neighborhood as new shoppers wander in to see the changes. The store owners are willing to purchase local produce through Riverside Food Co-Op, a HEAL Zone partner, but are still working to reach the price that benefits the farmer, the store owner, and their customers. The store customers may opt for a store with lower prices, rather than valuing quality or local produce.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

NEOP retail staff will continue to provide technical support and conduct regular retail visits to assist with signage and nutrition information. The neighborhood can drive the sustainability by sharing their needs with the store owners, in an effort to meet their demands for healthy foods. The NEOP staff plan to conduct a CX³ community reassessment in 2016, and hope to document improvements in the retail environment due to the efforts of multiple funding sources and partners.

One of the HEAL Zone goals is that the stores purchase a variety of local, seasonal produce direct from farmers or a local grower/distributor. Eventually, it would be optimal to gather sales data and customer feedback to determine which changes are the most effective, and discover methods to market to the larger community. One store does not

accept WIC currently, but is interested in reapplying (they were a previous WIC vendor). Becoming a WIC vendor would meet a need in the community and increase their sales of healthy foods, which may contribute to lower prices based on higher volume orders.

Contact information about this Narrative

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